Inspiring Lives

of

Sri Ramakrishna, Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda

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A Brief Life of
SRI RAMAKRISHNA

Early Days

Religion declines when people talk about religion but do not practise it, or when people use it for their own selfish motives.

Religion becomes polluted when hypocrisy and dishonesty, lust and greed, jealousy and hatred, ego and fanaticism are rampant in people's minds. Krishna declared in the *Bhagavad Gita*: 'When religion declines and irreligion prevails, I incarnate myself in every age to establish religion.' As the same moon rises in the sky again and again, so the same God descends to the earth as a human being in different places and in different times to fulfil the need of the age and to point out the goal of human life. This is not a myth: the lives of Rama, Krishna, Buddha, Moses, Christ, Muhammad, Chaitanya, and Ramakrishna attest to the Gita's statement.

Sri Ramakrishna was born on Wednesday, 18 February 1836, in Kamarpukur, a small village 112 km northwest of Kolkata. In the spring of 1835 his father, Khudiram Chattopadhyay, had gone to visit the holy city of Gaya to perform a rite for his ancestors in the Vishnu Temple. One night in his sleep, Khudiram had a vision. A luminous being gazed at him affectionately and then said in a sweet voice: 'Khudiram, your great devotion has made me very happy. The time has come for me to be born once again on earth. I shall be born as your son.'

Khudiram was filled with joy until he realized that he did not have the means to carry out such a great responsibility. So he said: 'No, my Lord, I am not fit for this favour. I am too poor to serve you properly.' 'Do not be afraid, Khudiram,' said the Lord. 'Whatever you give me to eat, I shall enjoy.' Khudiram awoke, convinced that the Lord of the universe was going to be born into his household. He then left Gaya and returned to Kamarpukur before the end of April.

On Khudiram's return, his wife, Chandra, told him of an experience she had had in front of the Yogi Shiva Temple next to their house. Chandra said: 'I saw that the holy image of

Lord Shiva inside the shrine was alive! It began to send forth waves of the most beautiful light — slowly at first, then quicker and quicker. They filled the inside of the temple, then they came pouring out — it was like one of those huge flood waves in the river — right towards me! I was going to tell Dhani [a neighbour woman], but then the waves washed over me and swallowed me up, and I felt that marvellous light enter into my body. I fell down on the ground, unconscious. When I came to myself, I told Dhani what had happened, but she did not believe me. She said that I'd had an epileptic fit. That cannot be so, because since then I have been full of joy and my health is better than ever. Only — I feel that light is still inside me, and I believe that I am with child.'

Khudiram then told Chandra about his vision, and they rejoiced together. The pious couple waited patiently for the divine child's birth the following spring. Because of Khudiram's experience at Gaya, Sri Ramakrishna was named "Gadadhar," meaning "Bearer-of-the-Mace," an epithet of Vishnu. Ramakrishna grew up in Kamarpukur. He was sent to school where he learned to read and write, but he soon lost interest in this "bread-earning education" and

quit school altogether. However, he continued to constantly learn by watching people in his rural village. He was *shrutidhar,* which means that whatever he heard once, he never forgot.

When he was six or seven years old, he had his first experience of cosmic consciousness. 'One morning,' he recalled in later life, 'I took some parched rice in a small basket and was eating it while walking along the narrow ridges of the rice fields. In one part of the sky, a beautiful black cloud appeared, heavy with rain. I was watching it and eating the rice. Very soon the cloud covered almost the entire sky. And then a flock of cranes came flying by. They were as white as milk against that black cloud. It was so beautiful that I became absorbed in the sight. Then I lost consciousness of everything outward. I fell down and the rice was scattered over the earth. Some people saw this and came and carried me home.'

Khudiram died in 1843. Ramakrishna keenly felt the loss of his father and became more indrawn and meditative. He began to visit the small village inn where pilgrims and especially monks would stop on their way to Puri. While serving these holy people he learned their songs and prayers. Following the brahminical

tradition, Ramakrishna was invested with the sacred thread when he was nine years old; this allowed him to perform the ritualistic worship for the family deities. He had some friends with whom he would play, sing, and act out religious dramas. Once during *Shivaratri* (a spring festival of Lord Shiva) he lost outer consciousness while enacting the role of Shiva. On another occasion, while going to worship the Divine Mother in a neighbouring village, he again went into samadhi.

Dakshineswar Temple and Vision of Kali

In 1850 Ramkumar, Khudiram's eldest son, opened a school in Kolkata. As a secondary profession, he performed religious rituals in private homes. It soon became difficult for him to manage both responsibilities, so in 1852 he brought Ramakrishna to assist him in performing the rituals. On 31 May 1855 Ramkumar accepted the responsibility of officiating at the dedication ceremony of the Kali Temple of Dakshineswar that had been founded by Rani Rasmani, a wealthy woman of Kolkata. Ramakrishna was present on that occasion.

Soon afterwards he moved to Dakshineswar and in time became a priest in the temple. Ramkumar died in 1856.

Ramakrishna now began his spiritual journey in earnest. While worshipping the Divine Mother, he questioned: 'Are you true, Mother, or is it all a fiction of the mind — mere poetry without any reality? If you do exist, why can't I see you? Is religion, then, a fantasy, a mere castle in the air?' His yearning for God-realization became more and more intense day by day. He prayed and meditated almost twenty-four hours a day. Then he had a remarkable experience:

> There was an unbearable pain in my heart because I could not see the Mother. Just as a man wrings a towel with all his strength to get the water out of it, so I felt as if my heart and mind were being wrung out. I began to think I should never see Mother. I was dying of despair. In my agony, I said to myself: 'What's the use of living this life?' Suddenly my eyes fell on the sword that hangs in the temple. I decided to end my life with it, then and there. Like a madman, I ran to it and seized it. And then — I had a marvellous

> vision of the Mother, and fell down unconscious.… It was as if houses, doors, temple and everything else vanished altogether; as if there was nothing anywhere! And what I saw was an infinite, shoreless sea of light; a sea that was consciousness. However far and in whatever direction I looked, I saw shining waves, one after another, coming towards me. They were raging and storming upon me with great speed. Very soon they were upon me; they made me sink down into unknown depths. I panted and struggled and lost consciousness.

After this vision it was not possible for Ramakrishna to continue performing the worship in the temple. He entrusted this responsibility to his nephew Hriday, and spent more than two years in a God-intoxicated state. In 1859 he returned to Kamarpukur and lived with his mother for a year and seven months. During this time, Ramakrishna's mother arranged his marriage to Sarada Mukhopadhyay, a very young girl from Jayrambati, a few kilometres west of Kamarpukur. After the marriage Ramakrishna returned alone to Dakshineswar in 1860.

Once at Dakshineswar Ramakrishna was caught up again in a spiritual tempest. He forgot his home, wife, family, body, and surroundings. He described his experiences during that period:

> No sooner had I passed through one spiritual crisis than another took its place. It was like being in the midst of a whirlwind — even my sacred thread was blown away, and I could seldom keep hold of my *dhoti* [cloth]. Sometimes I'd open my mouth, and it would be as if my jaws reached from heaven to the underworld. "Mother!" I'd cry desperately. I felt I had to pull her in, as a fisherman pulls in fish with his dragnet. A prostitute walking the street would appear to me to be Sita going to meet her victorious husband. An English boy standing cross-legged against a tree reminded me of the boy Krishna, and I lost consciousness. Sometimes I would share my food with a dog. My hair became matted. Birds would perch on my head and peck at the grains of rice that had lodged there during the worship. Snakes would crawl over my motionless body.

An ordinary man couldn't have borne a quarter of that tremendous fervour; it would have burnt him up. I had no sleep at all for six long years. My eyes lost the power of winking. I stood in front of a mirror and tried to close my eyelids with my finger — but then, suddenly, I'd be filled with ecstasy. I saw that my body didn't matter — it was of no importance, a mere trifle. Mother appeared to me and comforted me and freed me from my fear.

Other Spiritual Disciplines

In 1861 a nun called Bhairavi Brahmani came to Dakshineswar to initiate Ramakrishna into tantric disciplines. The Master practised sixty-four methods of Tantra and attained perfection through all of them. He then practised other methods of the Vaishnava tradition, such as *vatsalya bhava* (the affectionate attitude towards God) and *madhura bhava* (the lover's attitude towards the beloved). In 1864 Ramakrishna was initiated into sannyasa by Tota Puri, a Vedanta monk, and attained *nirvikalpa samadhi,* the highest non-dualistic experience, in only three days.

In 1866 Ramakrishna practised Islam under the guidance of a Sufi named Govinda Roy. The Master later mentioned to his disciples: 'I devoutly repeated the name of Allah, and I said their prayers five times daily. I spent three days in that mood, and I had the full realization of the sadhana of their faith.'

In 1873 Ramakrishna met Shambhu Charan Mallik, who read the Bible to him and spoke to him of Jesus. One day Ramakrishna visited Jadu Mallik's garden house, which was adjacent to the Dakshineswar temple. In his living room there was a picture of the Madonna with the child Jesus sitting on her lap. While Ramakrishna was gazing at this picture, he saw that the figures of the mother and child were shining and rays of light were coming forth from them and entering his heart.

For the next three days he was absorbed in the thought of Jesus, and at the end of the third day, while walking in the Panchavati, he had a vision of a foreign-looking person with a beautiful face and large eyes of uncommon brilliance. As he pondered who this stranger could be, a voice from within said: 'This is Jesus Christ, the great yogi, the loving Son of God, who was one with his Father and who shed his heart's blood and suffered

tortures for the salvation of mankind!' Jesus then embraced Ramakrishna and merged into his body.

After realizing God in different religions as well as in different sects of Hinduism, Ramakrishna proclaimed: 'As many faiths, so many paths.' In this present age, Ramakrishna's teachings are the antidote to narrowness, bigotry, fanaticism, and intolerance towards different religions. He said: 'It is not good to feel that one's own religion alone is true and all others are false. God is one only, and not two. Different people call on him by different names: some as Allah, some as God, and others as Krishna, Shiva, and Brahman. It is like the water in a lake. The Hindus call it "jal," the Christians "water," and the Muslims "pani."'

The precious jewels of spirituality that he had gathered through hard struggle during the first three-quarters of his life were now ready to be given to humanity. In 1875 Ramakrishna met Keshab Chandra Sen, a popular Brahmo leader who was considered a spiritual luminary. Keshab and his followers began publishing the life and teachings of Ramakrishna in their journals, and as a result many people, especially young Bengalis, came to know about the saint of Dakshineswar.

Through direct experience Ramakrishna realized that the form of the Divine Mother was one with the formless Supreme Brahman, like fire and its burning power, like milk and its whiteness. The Divine Mother once said to the Master: 'You and I are one. Let your life in this world be deep in devotion to me, and pass your days for the good of mankind. The devotees will come.'

Coming of the Disciples

As a loving father is anxious to leave his accumulated wealth to his children, so a true guru wants to give his spiritual treasures to his disciples. After his first vision Ramakrishna had to wait nearly twenty-five years for his disciples and devotees. We can read in the scriptures or in the lives of the mystics about the aspirants' longing for God but never about God's longing for the aspirants. Here is a testimony in Ramakrishna's own words:

> There was no limit to the longing I felt at that time. During the daytime I somehow managed to control it. The secular talk of

the worldly-minded was galling to me, and I would look wistfully to the day when my own beloved companions would come. I hoped to find solace in conversing with them and relating to them my own realizations. Every little incident would remind me of them, and thoughts of them wholly engrossed me. I was already arranging in my mind what I should say to one and give to another, and so on. But when the day would come to a close I would not be able to curb my feelings. The thought that another day had gone by, and they had not come, oppressed me. When during the evening service the temples rang with the sound of bells and conch-shells, I would climb to the roof of the *kuthi* [bungalow] in the garden and, writhing in anguish of heart, cry at the top of my voice: 'Come, my children! Oh, where are you? I cannot bear to live without you.' A mother never longed so intensely for the sight of her child, nor a friend for his companions, nor a lover for his sweetheart, as I longed for them. Oh, it was indescribable! Shortly after this period of yearning the devotees began to come.

Ramakrishna's disciples and devotees arrived between 1879 and 1885, and he became busy training them to carry out his mission. He was an extraordinary teacher. He stirred his disciples' hearts more by his subtle influence than by actions or words. Ramakrishna trained each disciple according to his own natural aptitude, as he knew everyone's past, present, and future. He never thrust his ideas upon anyone. To those young men who were destined to be monks he pointed out the steep path of both external and internal renunciation. When teaching the would-be monastic disciples the path of renunciation and discrimination, he would not allow householder devotees to be near them.

When the flower blooms, bees come of their own accord. People from all over flocked to Ramakrishna and he would sometimes talk about God as much as twenty hours a day. This continued for years. His intense love for humanity would not allow him to refuse help to anyone. In the middle of 1885, this physical strain resulted in throat cancer. When his disciples tried to stop him from teaching, he said: 'I do not care. I will give up twenty thousand such bodies to help one man.'

Ramakrishna was moved from Dakshineswar to Kolkata and later to Cossipore for medical treatment.

Towards the end of his life, Ramakrishna distributed ochre cloths (the symbol of monasticism) to some of his young disciples, thus forming his own Order. He made Narendra (later, Swami Vivekananda) their leader, who later came to America to represent Hinduism, or Vedanta, at the 1893 Parliament of Religions in Chicago. He summarized Ramakrishna's message to the modern world in his lecture "My Master":

> Do not care for doctrines, do not care for dogmas or sects or churches or temples. They count for little compared with the essence of existence in each man, which is spirituality; and the more a man develops it, the more power he has for good. Earn that first, acquire that, and criticize no one; for all the doctrines and creeds have some good in them. Show by your lives that religion does not mean words or names or sects, but that it means spiritual realization.

Sri Ramakrishna passed away on 16 August 1886 at the Cossipore garden house; his body

was cremated on the bank of the Ganges. Sri Ramakrishna revealed his divine nature many times to his disciples. A couple of days before the Master's passing, while he was suffering from excruciating pain from cancer, Vivekananda was seated near his bed. Seeing Ramakrishna's emaciated body Vivekananda thought to himself:

'Well, now if you can declare that you are God, then only will I believe you are really God Himself. Immediately Sri Ramakrishna looked up towards Vivekananda and said: 'He who was Rama and he who was Krishna is now Ramakrishna in this body.'

What Others have Said about Him

Sri Aurobindo

Of all these souls Sri Ramakrishna was the last and greatest, for while others felt God in a single or limited aspect, he felt Him in His illimitable unity as the sum of an illimitable variety. In him the spiritual experiences of the millions of saints who had gone before were renewed and united.

Mahatma Gandhi

The story of Ramakrishna Paramahansa's life is a story of religion in practice. His life enables us to see God face to face. No one can read the story of his life without being convinced that God alone is real and all else is an illusion.

Romain Rolland

The man (Ramakrishna) was the consummation of two thousand years of the spiritual life of three hundred million people.

Arnold J. Toynbee

Sri Ramakrishna's message was unique in being expressed in action.... Religion is not just a matter for study, it is something that has to be experienced and to be lived, and this is the field in which Sri Ramakrishna manifested his uniqueness.... His religious activity and experience were, in fact, comprehensive to a degree that had perhaps never before been attained by any other religious genius, in India or elsewhere.

Sri Ramakrishna's testimony to the harmony of religions....can make it possible for the human race to grow together into a single family — and, in the Atomic Age, this is the only alternative to destroying ourselves.

TEACHINGS

You see many stars at night in the sky but find them not when the sun rises; can you say that there are no stars in the heaven of day? So, O man, because you behold not God in the days of your ignorance, say not that there is no God.

• • •

God is formless and God is with form too, and He is that which transcends both form and formlessness. He alone can say what else He is.

• • •

God is one, but many are His aspects. As one master of the house appears in various aspects, being father to one, brother to another, and husband to a third, so one God is described and called in various ways according to the particular aspects in which He appears to His particular worshipper.

• • •

He is born to no purpose who, having the rare privilege of being born a man, is unable to realize God in this life.

• • •

A boat may stay in water, but water should not stay in the boat. An aspirant may live in the world but the world should not live in him.

• • •

A truly religious man should think that other religions also are paths leading to truth. We should always maintain an attitude of respect towards other religions.

• • •

Remain always strong and steadfast in your own faith, but eschew all bigotry and intolerance.

• • •

That knowledge which purifies the intellect is the true knowledge, everything else is non-knowledge.

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A Brief Life of
SRI SARADA DEVI

Early Days

Sarada Devi was born on 22 December 1853 in the little village of Jayrambati in the district of Bankura in West Bengal. Her parents, Ramachandra Mukhopadhyaya and Shyama-sundari, were orthodox Brahmins. They were poor but generous and utterly simple. Many years later, Sarada Devi speaking of her parents' virtuous nature, remarked: 'If they had not led a life of spiritual discipline, how could divinity have been born as their child?'

It is said that before Sarada's birth, both parents had had visions foretelling the advent of a divine being. Once Ramachandra went on a visit to Kolkata. There he had a dream in which he saw a radiant little girl of golden complexion was clasping his neck, 'Who are you?' he asked. She replied: 'Well, you see, I have come into your family.'

On his return home he told Shyama about it. She was surprised, for she too had had a vision. She described it thus: 'One day, as I was going to the river, I sat down under a big tree there. Suddenly, I saw a charming little girl coming down from the tree. I was frightened at first, but she was full of angelic beauty and clasped my neck with her tender arms. I lost consciousness, and people carried me home. I feel she has entered my body.'

Marriage

At the age of five Sarada was married to Sri Ramakrishna, then twenty-three years old. Strange as this marriage may appear in our eyes, such marriages were not uncommon in those days. It was more in the nature of a betrothal.

Sri Ramakrishna had been passing through a state of God-intoxication. As he was completely indifferent to food, sleep, and other physical requirements, and absorbed day and night in meditation and prayer, people took him for a madman. His relatives finally hit upon the idea of finding him a wife so as to bring his mind to the normal state. Sri

Ramakrishna agreed to be married. He even pointed out where his bride would be found. But immediately after the marriage, he left for Dakshineswar to plunge again into the practice of spiritual discipline.

It was after eight years, when Sri Ramakrishna visited Kamarpukur again, that Sarada had her first real contact with her husband. The Master instructed her in both spiritual and secular matters. He emphasized the need of such spiritual disciplines as non-attachment, self-control, meditation, and prayer. He also taught her the duties of a householder: how to serve guests, show respect to elders, discharge worldly duties in an unselfish spirit, and even how to trim a lamp, etc. In Sri Ramakrishna's company her happiness knew no bounds. 'At that time,' she said later, 'I always felt as if a jar brimful of bliss was set in my heart. It is impossible to describe the fullness of that joy.'

After spending a year or so at Kamarpukur, Sri Ramakrishna returned to Dakshineswar. Four long years passed again in intense God-consciousness. Reports reached the village that Ramakrishna had turned mad at Dakshineswar. Sarada was worried and felt that she should be with her husband to serve him.

Soon an opportunity arrived. She made up her mind to come to Dakshineswar and see the situation with her own eyes. Her father agreed to accompany her. During the trip she was attacked with a high fever and thought she would not be able to see her husband. But as she lay ill she was assured in a vision by the Divine Mother Kali that the purpose of her journey would be fulfilled. After recovering somewhat, she proceeded with her father.

Sarada reached Dakshineswar. Sri Ramakrishna welcomed her affectionately and made arrangements for her treatment. In no time she discovered that her husband was as tender and cordial as ever. Henceforth she remained by his side as his wife and disciple — but always a nun.

One day Sri Ramakrishna, finding Sarada alone in his room, asked her, 'Have you come here to drag me down to the life of the world?'

'Certainly not,' she replied without a moment's hesitation. 'Why should I entangle you in the world? I am here to help you realize your spiritual ideal.'

She, on her part, asked him as she was stroking his feet: 'How do you look upon?' Pat came the reply: 'The Divine Mother who is

worshipped in the temple, and the mother who gave birth to this body and is now living in the Nahabat (Music Tower), is now stroking my feet. Truly do I regard you as the Blissful Mother of the Universe.'

Now Sarada was almost eighteen. Sri Ramakrishna was convinced that the ordinary relationship between husband and wife sanctioned by society and religion did not apply to them. Sarada was indeed a manifestation of the Divine Mother, and he felt that the time was ripe to fully awaken the divinity in her. On an auspicious night he arranged in his room a special worship of the Divine Mother. Sarada took the place of the deity, and her husband offered her formal worship. Sarada was completely lost in herself. She was not aware of anything. After the worship was over, Ramakrishna prostrated himself before her, seated firmly like an image, and prayed : 'O Mother of the Universe, I salute Thee again and again.'

Since that day Sarada felt that a divine power had entered into her. The simple village girl had become transformed into the Holy Mother, Sarada Devi!

One day Sarada was returning from Jayrambati to Dakshineswar with several companions. They

were passing through a long and lonely stretch of land, which was infested with dacoits. She had lagged behind her companions; it was dusk, and suddenly she found herself quite alone. She was terrified to see a dark, hefty man approaching. In his hand he carried a long, stout stick. Sarada realized that he must be a dacoit and stopped. The man asked rudely who she was. In gentle words she said, 'Father, my companions have left me behind. Perhaps I have lost my way. Your son-in-law (referring to Sri Ramakrishna) lives at Dakshineswar and I am on my way to him. Please accompany me. He will certainly be grateful for your help.'

Sarada Devi's utter simplicity, straight forwardness, and gentle words completely won the hearts of the robber and his wife. They took her home, fed her, and put her to bed. In the morning they escorted her a long distance, till she was safely on the road to Dakshineswar. In later years this couple visited Sri Ramakrishna many times with suitable gifts. At one time she asked them why they showed her such affection. They replied: 'But you are not an ordinary human being; we saw you as Mother Kali. Perhaps you hide your real nature from us because we are sinners.'

Sarada Devi's life at Dakshineswar was of unceasing activity and stillness of prayer. She woke up before four o'clock in the morning and spent an hour and a half in meditation and worship. Though she lived a very austere life there, she was quite happy serving Sri Ramakrishna. One day a rich man offered him ten thousand rupees to meet his daily needs. The Master, who was the embodiment of renunciation, refused the gift immediately. The man then asked if he could leave the money with Sarada Devi. Sri Ramakrishna told her of the offer but was met with a stern refusal. 'I certainly cannot accept it,' she said. 'My acceptance would be the same as yours.' Hearing her words, the Master felt greatly relieved.

Sri Ramakrishna was fully aware of Sarada Devi's divine nature and her future mission. He gave her detailed instruction about how to awaken the spirituality of her future disciples. One day, a short time before his passing away, Sri Ramakrishna said to her: 'Won't you do anything. Must this (pointing to his own body) do everything?' 'But,' she protested, 'I am a mere woman. What can I do?' 'No, no,' said Sri Ramakrishna, 'You will do many things.'

On another occasion he remarked to her, 'Look at the people of Kolkata. They are squirming like worms in darkness. Please look after them. How little this (referring to his body) has accomplished! You have a much heavier task.' In her later life she once said to a disciple, 'The Master regarded all creatures as manifestations of the Divine Mother. He left me behind to manifest the motherhood of God.'

After the Master's Passing away

When Sri Ramakrishna passed away on 16 August 1886, Sarada Devi stood by his bedside and wept like a bereaved child. 'Mother! O Kali!' she cried, 'What have I done that you have gone away, leaving me alone and helpless?' When she was about to take off her ornaments, as is the custom of Hindu widows, Sri Ramakrishna appeared before her, looking as he did before he was stricken with cancer. Pressing her hand, he said, 'Am I dead that you are acting like a widow? I have moved from one room to another.' She did not take off the bracelets and wore them as long as she lived.

From now on it will be appropriate to refer to Sarada Devi as Holy Mother, the name by

which she is now cherished by the devotees of Sri Ramakrishna. A fortnight after the Master's passing away, Holy Mother set out on a pilgrimage in company with several disciples of the Master in order to get relief from her sorrow, and she visited Varanasi, Ayodhya, Hardwar, Allahabad, etc. Several times she had visions of the Master which considerably assuaged her grief. She visited Bodh-Gaya, the place of the Buddha's enlightenment, where she saw monks living in affluence in a monastery. Remembering the hardship and poverty of Sri Ramakrishna's wandering disciples, she prayed fervently to God for their physical welfare.

Sri Ramakrishna said that when flowers bloom, bees gather around them of their own accord. As Holy Mother's inner life blossomed forth, spiritual seekers felt the irresistible attraction of its fragrance and came to her unasked. They came from all directions—whether she was in Kolkata or in her native village, or was visiting different parts of India in the course of her pilgrimages. She became an unfailing source of inspiration to the members of the Ramakrishna Order who devoted their lives to meditation, prayer and

study, or to the service of humanity. She showered her blessings equally upon contemplatives and active monks, and encouraged householder devotees to perform their duties in a spirit of detachment, and to practice regular meditation and prayer. She became their sole refuge from the tribulations of the world.

Once the Mother was waiting for a train at the Bishnupur railway station during a journey to Kolkata. Suddenly a porter walked up to her. He was accustomed to worship Rama and Sita. The man fell at the Holy Mother's feet exclaiming: 'O you are Mother Janaki (Sita). How long have I been searching for you. Today is my good fortune that I have found you.' The Mother recognized the genuine devotion of the porter and initiated him with a 'Mantra' on the station platform itself.

One of Holy Mother's nieces played a very important part in her life and in the fulfilment of her earthly mission. Her name was Radhu. Once Mother made a significant remark: 'Everyone says that I am terribly attached to Radhu. But without this attachment I could not have kept my body alive after the Master's death. Thus it is the Master himself who has

made me cling to Radhu — just to preserve my body. When my mind becomes indifferent to her I shall leave this world.'

How this ordinary humanity concealed Holy Mother's divinity has been well expressed by Swami Premananda, one of the Master's prominent disciples. In the course of a letter, he wrote: 'Our Mother, an empress among queens, has become of her own accord a beggar and does all the menial work with her own hands. She is putting up with hardship to teach householders how to perform their duties.'

Holy Mother, like her husband, was Divinity Incarnate. It was the same power which became manifest through the human forms of both Sri Ramakrishna and Sarada Devi. In the former the outer manifestation was greater than in the latter. It was this embodiment of the Divine Mother of the Universe that Sri Ramakrishna had worshipped in his room at Dakshineswar.

The Mother left the world on 21 July 1920 and was cremated on the bank of the Ganga at the Belur Math. Today on this very spot stands a beautiful little temple.

What Others have Said about Her

Sri Ramakrishna

She is Sarada, Saraswati; she has come to impart knowledge. She has descended by covering up her beauty this time... She is full of the rarest wisdom. Is she of the common run? She is my Shakti.

Swami Vivekananda

None of you has understood Mother. Her grace upon me is one hundred thousand times greater than that of the Master…. About Mother I am a little fanatic. I can do anything if she gives the order. I shall give a sigh of relief when you purchase a piece of land and instal this living Durga there.

Swami Brahmananda

It is difficult to understand Mother. She moves about, veiling her face, like an ordinary woman, but in reality she is the Mother of the Universe. Could we have recognized her if the Master himself had not revealed to us who she was?

Swami Shivananda

Is our Mother an ordinary mother? For the good of the world the Mother of the Universe embodied Herself to give liberation to souls.

TEACHINGS

I am the mother of the wicked as I am the mother of the virtuous. Whenever you are in distress, just say to yourself, 'I have a mother.'

• • •

Many are known to do great works under the stress of some strong emotion. But one's true nature is known from the manner in which one does one's insignificant daily task.

• • •

Suppose one of my children has smeared himself with dirt. It is I, and no one else, who shall have to wash him clean and take him in my arms. To make mistake is man's very nature; but few of those who criticize know how to correct them.

• • •

Do not fear, my child. Always remember that the Master is behind you. I am also with you. As long as you remember me, your mother, why

should you be frightened? The Master said to me, 'In the end I shall certainly liberate those who come to you.'

• • •

If you want peace of mind do not look into other's faults. Rather look into you own. Learn to make the whole world your own. No one is a stranger, my child. The whole world is your own.

• • •

The less you become attached to the world the more you enjoy peace of mind.

• • •

One never finds Him without love and devotion.

• • •

One who has a pure mind, considers everyone pure.

• • •

A Brief Life of SWAMI VIVEKANANDA

Early Days

Swami Vivekananda, or Narendranath Datta, or simply Naren, as he was called in his pre-monastic days, was born to Vishwanath Datta and Bhuvaneswari Devi in Kolkata on Monday, 12 January 1863. The Datta family was rich, respectable, and renowned for charity, learning, and a strong spirit of independence. Narendranath's grandfather, Durgacharan Datta, was well-versed in Persian and Sanskrit and was skilled in law. But after the birth of his son Vishwanath, he renounced the world and became a monk. He was then only twenty-five years of age.

Vishwanath Datta was an attorney-at-law in the Kolkata High Court. He was proficient in English and Persian, and took great delight in reciting to his family the poems of the Persian poet Hafiz. He also enjoyed the study of the

Bible and of the Hindu scriptures in Sanskrit. Though charitable to an extravagant degree and sympathetic towards the poor, Vishwanath was rationalistic and progressive in outlook in matters religious and social, owing perhaps to the influence of western culture. Bhuvaneswari Devi was an accomplished lady with a regal bearing. She was deeply religious. Before the birth of Narendranath, though she had daughters, she yearned for a son and asked one of her relatives at Varanasi to make religious offerings to Viresvara Shiva. It is said that she dreamt later that Shiva promised to be born as her son. Narendranath was born some time afterwards.

In his early childhood, Narendranath was rather restless and given to much fun and frolic. But at the same time, he had a great attraction for spiritual matters and would play at worshipping or meditating on the images of Rama-Sita, Shiva, etc. The stories of the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata,* which his mother told him, left an indelible impression on his mind. Traits such as courage, sympathy for the poor, and attraction towards wandering monks appeared spontaneously in him. Even in childhood, Narendranath demanded con-

vincing arguments for every proposition. With these qualities of head and heart, he grew into a vigorous youth.

At the Feet of Sri Ramakrishna

As a youth, Narendranath's leonine beauty was matched by his courage. He had the build of an athlete, a resonant voice, and a brilliant intellect. He distinguished himself in athletics, philosophy, and music, and among his colleagues was the undisputed leader. At college, he studied and absorbed western thought, and this implanted a spirit of critical inquiry in his mind. His inborn tendency towards spirituality and his respect for ancient religious traditions and beliefs, on the one side, and his argumentative nature, coupled with his sharp intellect, on the other, were now at war with each other. In this predicament, he tried to find comfort in the Brahmo Samaj, the popular socio-religious movement of the time. The Brahmo Samaj believed in a formless God, deprecated the worship of idols, and addressed itself to various forms of social reform. Narendranath also met prominent religious leaders, but could not get

a convincing answer from them to his questions about the existence of God. This only accentuated his spiritual restlessness.

At this critical juncture, he remembered the words of his Professor, William Hastie, who had mentioned that a saint lived at Dakshineswar, just outside Kolkata, who experienced the ecstasy described by Wordsworth in his poem, *The Excursion*. His cousin, Ramachandra Datta, also induced him to visit the saint. Thus came about, in 1881, the historic meeting of these two great souls, the prophet of modern India and the carrier of his message. Narendranath asked: 'Sir, have you seen God?' Sri Ramakrishna answered his question in the affirmative: 'Yes, I have seen Him just as I see you here, only more intensely.' At last, here was one who could assure him from his own *experience* that God existed. His doubt was dispelled. The disciple' s training had begun.

While Sri Ramakrishna tested him in so many ways, Narendranath, in turn, tested Sri Ramakrishna in order to ascertain the truth of his spiritual assertions. At one stage, after the passing away of his father in 1884, Narendranath's family suffered many troubles and privations. At the suggestion of his Master,

Narendranath tried to pray to Mother Kali at Dakshineswar for the alleviation of the family's distress. He found, however, that although his need was for wealth, he could pray only for knowledge and devotion.

Gradually, Narendranath surrendered himself to the Master. And Sri Ramakrishna, with infinite patience, calmed the rebellious spirit of his young disciple and led him forth from doubt to certainty and from anguish to spiritual bliss. But, more than Sri Ramakrishna's spiritual guidance and support, it was his love which conquered young Narendranath, love which the disciple reciprocated in full measure.

With Sri Ramakrishna's illness and his removal to Cossipore, on the outskirts of Kolkata, for treatment, began Narendranath's final training under his *guru.* It was a time remarkable for the intense spiritual fire which burned within him and which expressed itself through various intense practices. The Master utilized the opportunity to bring his young disciples under the leadership of Narendra. And when Narendra asked that he might be blessed with *nirvikalpa samadhi,* ordinarily regarded as the highest spiritual experience, the Master admonished him saying: 'Shame on you! I

thought you would grow like a huge banyan, sheltering thousands from the scorching misery of the world. But now I see you seek your own liberation.' All the same, Narendra had the much-coveted realization, after which the Master said that the key to this would thenceforth remain in his keeping and the door would not be opened till Narendra had finished the task for which he had taken birth. Three or four days before his *maha-samadhi,* Sri Ramakrishna transmitted to Narendranath his own power and told him: 'By the force of the power transmitted by me, great things will be done by you; only after that will you go to whence you came.'

After the passing away of the Master in August 1886, many of the young disciples gathered together in an old dilapidated house at Baranagore under the leadership of Narendranath. Here, in the midst of a life of intense austerity and spiritual practices, the foundation of the Ramakrishna brotherhood was laid. It was during these days that Narendranath, along with many of his brother disciples, went to Antpur; and there on Christmas Eve (1886), sitting round a huge fire in the open, they took the vow of *sannyasa.* The days at Baranagore

were full of great joy, study, and spiritual practices. But the call of the wandering life of the *sannyasin* was now felt by most of the monks. And Narendranath, too, towards the close of 1888, began to take temporary excursions away from the Math.

The Wandering Monk

A remarkable change of outlook came over Narendranath between the closing of 1888, when he first left on his temporary excursions, and 1890, when he parted finally from his brethren and travelled alone as an unknown mendicant. He began to assume various names in order to conceal his identity that he might be swallowed up in the immensity of India.

Now it was that the natural desire of an Indian monk for a life of solitude gave way to the prescience that he was to fulfil a great destiny; that his was not the life of an ordinary recluse struggling for personal salvation. Under the influence of his burning desire to know India better and the mute appeal rising all around him from oppressed India, he went first to Varanasi, the holiest city of the Hindus. After

Varanasi, he visited Lucknow, Agra, Vrindaban, Hathras, and Rishikesh, and then returned to Baranagore for a time. At Hathras, he met Sharat Chandra Gupta who became his first disciple (Swami Sadananda). He revealed to him the mission entrusted to him by his Master, namely, the spiritual regeneration of India and the world. Sharat, who was on the staff of the railway station at Hathras, resigned his post and followed his *guru* to help him in his mission.

An important event in the Swami's life at this time occurred in 1890, when he met Pavhari Baba of Ghazipur, for whose saintliness he had the greatest admiration throughout his life. At this time, he was torn between the desire, on the one hand, to become absorbed in the eternal silence of the Absolute and, on the other, the desire to fulfil his Master's mission. He hoped that Pavhari Baba would appease the remorse gnawing at his heart, which was due to the fact that fervour for the highest absorption in the Divine drew him away from the work entrusted to him by his Master. For twenty-one days Naren was on the point of yielding to this temptation, but the vision of Sri Ramakrishna always came to draw him back.

In July 1890, the Swami took leave of Sri Sarada Devi, the holy consort of Sri Ramakrishna, who was the spiritual guide of the young monks after the Master's passing away. He also took leave of his brother monks, with the firm resolve to cut himself free from all ties and to go into the solitude of the Himalayas, for he felt it essential to be alone. In the words of Romain Rolland: 'This was the great departure. Like a diver, he plunged into the Ocean of India and the Ocean of India covered his tracks. Among its flotsam and jetsam, he was nothing more than one nameless *sannyasin* in saffron robe among a thousand others. But the fire of genius burned in his eyes. He was a prince despite all disguise.'

His wandering took him to various places of pilgrimage and historical interest in Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, and Hyderabad. Everywhere the glory of ancient India vividly came before his eyes, whether political, cultural, or spiritual. In the midst of this great education, the abject misery of the Indian masses stood out before his mind. He moved from one princely State to another, everywhere to explore avenues of mitigating their lot. Thus he came

to meet many leading personalities and rulers of the princely States. Among them, Maharaja Ajit Singh of Khetri became his fast friend and ardent disciple. At Alwar, he studied the *Mahabhashya* of Patanjali. At Pune, he stayed with Bal Gangadhar Tilak, the great national leader. At first, Tilak talked with the Swami somewhat ironically, but later his depth of learning and profundity of thought impressed him, and he invited the Swami to stay with him. From there, after a stay at Belgaum, he went to Bangalore and Mysore. The Maharaja of Mysore gave him the assurance of financial support to enable him to go to the West to seek help for India and to preach the eternal religion. From Mysore, he visited Thiruvananthapuram and Kanya Kumari.

Wherever he went, it was not the important places and people that impressed him most. It was the terrible poverty and misery of the masses that caused his soul to burn in agony. He had travelled through the whole of India, often on foot, for nearly three years, coming to know India at first hand. Now he had reached the end of his journey, as it were. He prostrated himself with great feeling before the image of Mother Kumari at the Kanya Kumari temple.

Then he swam across the sea to a rock off the south coast, and sitting there for the whole night went into deep meditation. The vast panorama of his experiences during his travels passed before his mind's eye. He meditated on the past, the present, and the future of India, the causes of her downfall, and the means of her resurrection. He then took the momentous decision to go to the West to seek help for the poor of India and thus give shape to his life's mission.

With this decision, he journeyed to Rameswaram and Madurai. He then went on to Chennai, where a group of young men, headed by Alasinga Perumal, were eagerly awaiting his arrival. To them, he revealed his intention of visiting America to attend the Parliament of Religions that was being convened at Chicago. His young disciples forthwith raised a subscription for his passage. But the Swami was not yet certain that it was the Divine Mother's will that he should go, and so he asked them to give away the money to the poor. At this juncture, the Swami had a symbolic dream in which Sri Ramakrishna walked out into the sea and beckoned him to follow. This, coupled with the blessings and permission of Sri Sarada Devi,

who also, in a dream, had received Sri Ramakrishna's consent, settled the question for him, and his young friends again set about collecting the necessary funds.

He next paid a short visit to Hyderabad. Then, while arrangements were being made for his journey to America, there came a sudden invitation from the Maharaja of Khetri to attend celebrations in connection with the birth of his son. The Swami could not refuse this invitation from his disciple. The Maharaja received him cordially and promised to help him in every possible way. And it was here, at his suggestion, that the Swami assumed the name 'Vivekananda'. True to his word, the Maharaja sent his personal secretary with the Swami to equip him for the journey and see him off at Mumbai. His journey to America commenced on 31 May 1893.

On the World Stage

Swami Vivekananda travelled to America via China, Japan, and Canada, and reached Chicago about the middle of July. At Canton, he saw some Buddhist monasteries; in Japan, he noted

with admiration the industrial progress and cleanliness of the people. Now, at Chicago, so dazzling with riches and the inventive genius of the West, he was puzzled like a child. To his disappointment, he learnt that the Parliament of Religions would not be held until September, and that no one could be a delegate without credentials. He felt lost, but resigning himself to the will of Providence, he went to Boston which was less expensive than Chicago. Previously while travelling to Chicago, he had met Katherine Sanborn of Boston on the train. She had invited him to be her guest. Through her, he came to know Professor John Henry Wright of Harvard University, who gave him a letter of introduction to the Chairman of the Parliament of Religions. In the course of this letter, Dr. Wright said: 'Here is a man who is more learned than all our learned professors put together.'

The Swami returned to Chicago a couple of days before the opening of the Parliament of Religions, but found to his dismay that he had lost the address of the committee which was providing hospitality for the oriental delegates. After a night's rest in an empty wagon at the Chicago train station, the Swami

set out in the morning to find somebody who could help him out of this difficulty. But help for a coloured man was not readily available. Exhausted by a fruitless search, he sat down on the roadside resigning himself to the divine will. Suddenly, a lady of regal appearance emerged from the fashionable house opposite, approached him, and offered him help. This was Mrs. George W. Hale, whose house was to become in future the permanent address of the Swami while in the United States, for the Hale family became his devoted followers.

The Parliament of Religions opened on 11 September 1893. The spacious hall of the Art Institute was packed with above 4000 people, representing the best culture of the country. On the platform, every organized religion from all corners of the world had its representatives. The Swami had never addressed such a huge and distinguished gathering. He felt extremely nervous. When his turn came, he mentally bowed down to Sarasvati, the goddess of learning, and then began his address with the words, 'Sisters and Brothers of America'. Immediately, there was thunderous applause from the vast audience, and it lasted for full two minutes. 'Seven thousand people rose to

their feet as a tribute to something, they knew not what.' The appeal of his simple words of burning sincerity, his great personality, his bright countenance, and his orange robes was so great that next day the newspapers described him as the greatest figure in the Parliament of Religions. The simple monk with a begging bowl had become the man of the hour.

All the subsequent speeches of the Swami at the Parliament were listened to with great respect and appreciation. They all had one common theme—universality. While all the delegates to the Parliament spoke of their own religion the Swami spoke of a religion that was vast as the sky and deep as the ocean. When the Parliament ended, the days of quiet had ended for the Swami. What followed were days of hectic lecturing in almost every part of the United States. Having signed a contract for a lecture tour with a bureau, the Swami had to be constantly on the move, speaking to all sorts of audiences. Though this tour provided him with opportunities of knowing the different aspects of western life at first hand, he found that the bureau exploited and embarrassed him. He felt disgusted and severed his connection with it. Now he wanted to form a group of

earnest American disciples, and began classes, free of charge, for sincere students. His stay in the West, which lasted till December 1896, was packed with intense activity: besides innumerable lectures and classes at New York, he founded a Vedanta Society there; he trained a band of close disciples at the Thousand Island Park; and he wrote *Raja-yoga* and paid two successful visits to England, where he gave the lectures which now form *Jnana-yoga.* There he made some disciples, prominent among them being Capt. and Mrs. Sevier, Sister Nivedita, and E. T. Sturdy. Earlier, in New York, J. J. Goodwin, a young English stenographer had been accepted as his disciple. It was during these visits that he had the pleasure of meeting the great savant Max Muller. During his tour of Europe in the summer of 1895, he also met the famous German orientalist Paul Deussen.

He had laboured hard to give to the West his message of Vedanta as the universal principle basic to all religions, and his effort had by now resulted in the establishment of the Vedanta work on a permanent basis in the United States. The London work, too, had made some progress. Now his motherland was calling him and was eager to receive his message. So, from

London, he started for India at the end of 1896. Besides his American and English disciples, he left behind his brother disciples Saradananda and Abhedananda to carry on the work.

Triumphal Return

Swami Vivekananda left London with the Seviers on 16 December 1896, and after a visit to Rome and other places in Italy, he took the boat for India at Naples on 30 December. At Naples, Mr. Goodwin joined the party. They reached Colombo on 15 January 1897. The news of the Swami's return had already reached India, and the people everywhere, throughout the country, were afire with enthusiasm to receive him. He was no more the unknown *sannyasin.* In every city, small or big, committees had been formed to give him a fitting reception. As Romain Rolland says, the Swami 'replied to the frenzied expectancy of the people by his Message to India, a conch sounding the resurrection of the land of Rama, of Shiva, of Krishna, and calling the heroic Spirit, the immortal Atman, to march to war. He was a general, explaining his *Plan of Campaign,* and

calling his people to rise *en masse:* "My India, arise! Where is your vital force? In your Immortal Soul."' At Chennai, he delivered five public lectures, every one of which was a clarion call to throw away weakness and superstition and rise to build a new India. He emphasized that in India 'the keynote of the whole music of the national life' was religion, a religion which preached the 'spiritual oneness of the whole universe', and when that was strengthened, everything else would take care of itself. He did not spare his criticism, however, castigating his countrymen for aping the West, for their blind adherence to old superstitions, for their caste prejudices, and so on.

From Chennai the Swami sailed for Kolkata and arrived there on 20 February. His native city gave him a grand welcome, and here the Swami paid a touching tribute to his Master: 'If there has been anything achieved by me, by thoughts, or words, or deeds, if from my lips has ever fallen one word that has helped anyone in the world, I lay no claim to it, it was his. ... If this nation wants to rise, take my word for it, it will have to rally round his name.'

To establish his work on a firm basis, the Swami summoned all the monastic and lay

disciples to a meeting at Balaram Bose's house, and the Ramakrishna Mission was formed on 1 May 1897. The aims and ideals of the Mission propounded by the Swami were purely spiritual and humanitarian. He had inaugurated the machinery for carrying out his ideas.

When plague broke out in Kolkata in May 1898, he organized relief work with the help of the members of the monastery and lay disciples. After the plague was under control, the Swami and his western disciples left for Naini Tal and Almora. This was a period of great preparation and training for his western disciples, especially Sister Nivedita. On 16 June, the Swami left for Kashmir with some of these disciples. This trip to Kashmir was an unforgettable experience both for the Swami and for the disciples. At the end of July, the Swami journeyed with Sister Nivedita to the holy shrine of Amarnath. Observing meticulously every little practice demanded by custom, the Swami reached the cave of Amarnath on 2 August, wearing only loin-cloth, his body besmeared with ashes. His whole frame was trembling with emotion; a great mystical experience came over him, of which he never spoke, beyond saying that Shiva

Himself appeared before him. This was followed by a lonely visit to Kshir Bhavani, the shrine of the Mother Goddess, a few kilometers away from Srinagar. This proved to be another memorable experience for the Swami. He was full of the Mother and said, quoting from his own poem: 'It all came true, every word of it; and I have proved it, for I have hugged the form of Death.'

When he reached Kolkata on 18 October, he was pale and weak and suffering from various ailments. Despite this, he engaged himself in numerous activities. A piece of land had been acquired at Belur on the west bank of the Ganga, 8 km above Kolkata, and the construction of the monastery had started. In January 1899, the monks moved to the new monastery, the now famous Belur Math. The Nivedita Girls' School had been inaugurated earlier. The Bengali monthly *Udbodhan* was also started at this time. And the Seviers fulfilled the Swami's dream of having a monastery in the Himalayas, by starting the Advaita Ashrama at Mayavati (Champawat, Uttaranchal) in March 1899. The English monthly *Prabuddha Bharata* had been started at Chennai earlier, but on the untimely passing away of its editor in

1898, it ceased publication for a month. The monthly started again at Almora under the editorship of Swami Swarupananda, a disciple of Swami Vivekananda, and in 1899, it was transferred to the Advaita Ashrama at Mayavati.

During this period, the Swami constantly inspired the *sannyasins* and *brahmacharins* at the Math towards a life of intense spirituality and service, for one's own emancipation and the good of one's fellow men— *Atmano mokshartham jagat hitaya ca,* as he put it.

But the Swami's health was failing. And his plan to revisit the West was welcomed by his brother monks, in the hope that this would improve his health.

Across the World Again

Swami Vivekananda left India on 20 June 1899, taking with him Swami Turiyananda and Sister Nivedita. The journey with the Swami was a great education to both of them. Sister Nivedita wrote: 'From the beginning to the end, a vivid flow of stories went on. One never knew what moment would bring the flash of

intuition and the ringing utterance of some fresh truth.' After touching Chennai, Colombo, Aden, and Marseilles *en route,* the ship arrived at London on 31 July. The trip was beneficial to the Swami's health.

After spending two weeks in London, he sailed for New York. Arriving there, he went with Mr. and Mrs. Leggett to their beautiful country home called Ridgely Manor on the River Hudson. The Swami stayed at this country retreat until 5 November and then went to the west coast. He visited Los Angeles, Oakland, San Francisco, and also made short trips to Chicago and Detroit. Now the conviction that the East and the West ought to be mutually helpful and must co-operate with each other grew stronger upon him. The mere material brilliance of the West could not dazzle him, nor could the emphasis on spirituality in India hide her social and economic drawbacks.

He said to Nivedita: 'Social life in the West is like a peal of laughter; but underneath, it is a wail. It ends in a sob. ... Here in India, it is sad and gloomy on the surface, but underneath are carelessness and merriment.' The West had tried to conquer external nature, and the East

had tried to conquer internal nature. Now East and West must work hand in hand for the good of each other, without destroying the special characteristics of each. The West has much to learn from the East, and the East has much to learn from the West; in fact, the future has to be shaped by a proper fusion of the two ideals. Then there will be neither East nor West, but one humanity.

The main event of this period was the starting of the Shanti Ashrama in Northern California, which he placed under the charge of Swami Turiyananda. A Vedanta centre at San Francisco was also inaugurated. He also delivered a number of lectures in the western cities during this period. But the Swami was becoming more and more aware of the approaching end. He wrote to Miss MacLeod: 'My boat is nearing the calm harbour from which it is never more to be driven out.'

On 1 August 1900, he arrived in Paris to participate in the Congress of the History of Religions, held there on the occasion of the Universal Exposition. With some friends, he left Paris in October and visited Hungary, Rumania, Serbia, and Bulgaria, before arriving at Constantinople. Then they proceeded to

Athens and Cairo. In Cairo, the Swami suddenly became restless to return to India; he had a premonition of Capt. Sevier's death. He took the first available boat and hurried back to India and reached the Belur Math on 9 December 1900, without any previous intimation. It was a pleasant surprise to his brother monks and disciples, who greatly rejoiced at his return.

The Journey's End

At the Math, Swami Vivekananda heard that Capt. Sevier had passed away on 28 October, and he left immediately for Mayavati to console Mrs. Sevier. Arriving there on 3 January 1901, he stayed for a fortnight. The grandeur of the scenery of this Himalayan Ashrama, dedicated to Advaita, delighted him. In spite of his ill health and the severe cold, he wandered in the woods and around an artificial lake, happy and carefree.

Returning to Belur, he stayed there for seven weeks and then left for East Bengal and Assam. His mother, who had expressed an earnest desire to visit the holy places there, went with him. 'This is the one great wish of a Hindu widow', he wrote to Mrs. Bull. 'I have brought only misery to my

people. I am trying to fulfil this one wish of hers.' He returned to the Math in the second week of May 1901, after visiting Nangalbandh, Kamakhya, and Shillong during the tour, and delivering a few lectures at Dhaka and Shillong.

Now the Swami tried to lead a carefree life at the monastery. He would roam about the Math grounds, sometimes clad only in his loin-cloth; or he would supervise the cooking; or sit with the monks singing devotional songs. Sometimes, he would be seen imparting spiritual instructions to the visitors, at other times engaged in serious study in his room or explaining to the members of the Math the intricate passages of the scriptures and unfolding to them his schemes for future work. He freed himself entirely from all formal duties by executing a Deed of Trust in favour of his brother disciples, transferring to them all the properties, including the Belur Math, so far held in his name.

Towards the end of 1901, two learned Buddhists came from Japan to invite him to attend the forthcoming Congress of Religions there. The Swami could not accept their invitation, but went with them to Bodh Gaya and from there to Varanasi. At Varanasi, he was

delighted to see a few young men who, under the inspiration of his message, had started nursing the poor and the needy. Their work formed the nucleus of the future Ramakrishna Mission Home of Service.

The Swami knew his end was nearing. All his actions during the last days were deliberate and significant. He said that smaller plants cannot grow under the shade of a big tree. On 4 July 1902, he meditated from 8 to 11 in the morning, rather unusually. In the afternoon, he went out for a walk with Swami Premananda and explained his plan to start a Vedic school. In the evening, he retired to his room and spent an hour in meditation. Then he lay down quietly and after some time took two deep breaths and passed into eternal rest.

He had renounced his mortal body, but his words uttered in 1896 to Mr. Eric Hammond in London remained to reassure everyone of his immortality: 'It may be that I shall find it good to get outside my body to cast it off like a worn-out garment. But I shall not cease to work. I shall inspire men everywhere, until the world shall know that it is one with God.'

What Others have Said about Him

Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose

I cannot write about Vivekananda without going into raptures. Few indeed could comprehend or fathom him — even among those who had the privilege of becoming intimate with him. If he had been alive, I would have been at his feet.

Rabindranath Tagore

If you want to know India, study Vivekananda. In him everything is positive and nothing negative.

Mahatma Gandhi

Surely, Swami Vivekananda's writings need no introduction from anybody. They make their own irresistible appeal.

Romain Rolland

He (Vivekananda) was energy personified, and action was his message to men.... His preeminent characteristic was kingliness. He was a born king and nobody ever came near him either in India or America without paying homage to his majesty.

TEACHINGS

My ideal, indeed, can be put into a few words, and that is: to preach unto mankind their divinity, and how to make it manifest in every movement of life.

• • •

Education is the manifestation of perfection already in man.

• • •

We want that education by which character is formed, strength of mind is increased, the intellect is expanded, and by which one can stand on one's own feet.

• • •

So long as the millions die in hunger and ignorance, I hold every man a traitor who, having been educated at their expense, pays not the least heed to them!

• • •

Whatever you think, that you will be. If you think yourselves weak, weak you will be; if you think yourselves strong, strong you will be.

• • •

Strength is life; weakness is death.

• • •

Arise! Awake! and stop not till the goal is reached.

• • •

The older I grow, the more everything seems to me to lie in manliness. This is my new Gospel.

• • •

Purity, patience, and perseverance are the three essentials to success, and above all, *love*.

• • •

I only preach what is good for universal humanity.

• • •

Religion is realization; not talk, not doctrine, nor theories, however beautiful they may be. It is being and becoming, not hearing or acknowledging; it is the whole soul becoming changed into what it believes.